

General Policy Towards Cuba - Invasion & Internal Situation

Backgrounder -- December 31, 1962

QUESTION: Mr. President, right after the Cuban confrontation with the Soviet Union, there was considerable discussion about this having been a turning point in our relations with the Communists. Do you see, since then, any evidence of changes that are going to be long-term?

THE PRESIDENT: As I say, I think our problem is -- well, in the first place, I think the promise of communism has been exposed as a failure in many ways. I don't overstate that. In some ways they have been able to mobilize their resources quite effectively for a given purpose. But I would say that the bubble, or the concept of communism is an almost inevitable development in history which I think was more generally held after Sputnik and after '57 and '58, which was the time of the great leap forward, Cuba, after the revolution in Cuba, in, say, '59, when it began to move in a more obvious hostility to the United States, and in the Communist direction, I would say that since then the glow has gone out of it.

On the other hand, there still is this ability to maintain the police structure quite effectively. As I say, we have seen evidences where it cracked in the 50's, and without Soviet intervention, it would have cracked completely in these countries. I don't overstate it, but at least in Cuba, so far, and North Viet-Nam, North Korea, they have not been able to maintain their power.

But nobody can sit here today and say what is going to happen in Cuba. No one could say six months ago that what has happened in the last six months was going to happen. So I don't think we are able to lift the curtain on Cuba and say that this is going to happen month by month. That doesn't mean that with the frictions and tensions which a Communist system of government brings, a sort of wholesale exodus of the refugees, is only an example of the tensions that are there.

I would say that I believe that Cuba is going to be non-Communist sometime. There still is this problem of having great distress throughout the world, great poverty, a terribly low standard of living, which give the Communists an alternative to present dark reality and then when the Communists get in, even though they fail, because of the police apparatus, they are able to hold their power. That is one of the big problems we have.

If we get a free choice made after the Communists get in, you have no worries, because I don't think they can do the job of delivering. But they can maintain their power pretty effectively, as is being proved in several areas of the world. I would say that is the matter of greatest concern, our ability to get them out, once they are in, even though they fail to deliver.

QUESTION: What about the strain that the Cuban confrontation has put on --

THE PRESIDENT: But your question was about what changes. I don't know, but I think that probably, as I say, we have had two or three major clashes with the Communists which could have escalated. Laos, if we

hadn't gotten a cease-fire, might have escalated. Cuba could have escalated. Berlin, when he stated at Geneva that he was going to take Berlin, that could have escalated.

In 24 months we have had three situations which could be very dangerous. That is rather unhealthy in a nuclear age. I don't think we can say that Cuba is the turning point or the changing period, but I do think that the fall of 1962, the Sino-Indian struggle, the Sino-Soviet dispute, the Soviet-United States clash over Cuba, is bound to have its effects, even though they can't be fully perceived now.